

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION NEA-10

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SSM-03 HA-05 /084 W
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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5332
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS
USMISSION SINAI
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 11887

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, SY, LE
SUBJECT: SYRIAN INTENTIONS IN LEBANON

REF: A) DAMASCUS 5205, B) BEIRUT 5115, C) TEL AVIV 10377

1. WE ALL SEEM NOW TO AGREE THAT SYRIA WISHES TO BREAK
THE POLITICAL AND MILITARY POWER OF THE MARONITE MILITIAS.
THE UNANSWERED QUESTION IS WHAT ARE THE SYRIAN OBJECTIVES
IN ATTEMPTING TO ACCOMPLISH THIS TASK.

2. WHATEVER THE ANSWER, ISRAELIS ARE CERTAINLY MORE SUS-
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PICIOUS AND PERHAPS MORE CYNICAL THAN BOUTROS (REF. B).
THEY RELATE CONTINUING EFFORTS TO "WEAKEN" THE PHALANGE
AND NLP MILITIAS TO THE SYRIAN DESIRE TO OBTAIN LEBANESE
"COORDINATION" IN FOREIGN AND MILITARY POLICY. THE VIEW
THAT DAMASCUS SIMPLY AIMS TO BREAK THE MILITIAS SO THAT
THE LEBANESE ARMY CAN REASSERT GOL AUTHORITY IS CONSIDERED
NAIVE BY ISRAELIS. WHY, ISRAELIS ASK, WOULD SYRIA HAVE

SUCH A BENIGN OBJECTIVE WHEN ISRAEL, IN SIMILAR CIRCUMSTANCES, WOULD CERTAINLY DO EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO EXTEND ITS SPHERE OF INFLUENCE.

3. THE ISRAELIS ALSO NOTE THAT THE SYRIANS ALLOW FRAN-JIYAH TO RUN HIS FIEFDOM IN ZGHORTA WITHOUT HINDRANCE BECAUSE HE HAS ACQUIESCED IN DAMASCUS' LEBANESE POLICY. FURTHER, THE SYRIANS DO NOT INTRUDE INTO PALESTINIAN CAMPS OR MOST LEBANESE LEFTIST-CONTROLLED AREAS BECAUSE DAMASCUS SEES THEIR INTERESTS AS PARALLEL AT THE PRESENT TIME. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE GOI STRESSES THAT THE SYRIANS HAVE AND ARE CONTINUING TO TRY TO SUPPRESS THAT PART OF THE LEBANESE PEOPLE MOST OPPOSED TO LEBANON BECOMING A SYRIAN SPHERE OF INFLUENCE.

4. WE ALSO HEAR FROM THE GOI THE ARGUMENT THAT THE DESTRUCTION OF THE MARONITE MILITIAS (THE PRESUMED SYRIAN APPROACH, SINCE THE MILITIAS ARE UNLIKELY TO ACQUIESCE IN THEIR OWN "WEAKENING") IS NOT THE BEST WAY TO PUT TOGETHER A "REAL STATE OF LEBANON." BEATING THE MILITIAS INTO SUBMISSION AND COWING THE SEGMENT OF THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY WHO SUPPORT THEM, AS OPPOSED TO THE MORE DIFFICULT APPROACH OF COMPROMISE AND RECONCILIATION, HARDLY SEEMS TO THE GOI A PRODUCTIVE PATH LIKELY TO LEAD TO NATIONAL RECONCILIATION.

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5. ISRAELIS ACROSS THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM DO NOT AGREE WITH AMBASSADOR SEELYE'S COMMENT THAT THE GOI'S LEBANESE POLICY IS SHORTSIGHTED. AS BOUTROS HIMSELF NOTED, THE GOL WOULD NOW GO A LONG WAY TO OBLIGING THE SYRIANS ON FOREIGN POLICY AND MILITARY MATTERS. THE ISRAELIS ARE SKEPTICAL THAT THE SYRIANS, HAVING GOTTEN THIS FAR, WILL SETTLE FOR LESS THAN DOMINATION. WHY SHOULD THEY? AND WITH RESPECT TO BOUTROS' IMPLIED SUGGESTION OF A REASSERTION OF GOL SOVEREIGNTY BASED ON A RECONSTRUCTED ARMY AND POLITICAL CONSENSUS, THE ISRAELIS REGARD THAT AT THE MOMENT AS AN IMPOSSIBLE DREAM, HARDLY SOMETHING TO BUILD A POLICY ON. THE ISRAELIS ALSO ARGUE THAT THE SYRIANS ARE UNLIKELY TO SUPPORT THE CREATION OF A REBUILT LAF THAT WILL HAVE THE ABILITY TO STAND UP TO SYRIAN INFLUENCE. WHY SHOULD THEY? AS FOR THE GOAL OF POLITICAL CONSENSUS, THE GOI ARGUES IT HAS NOT EXISTED IN LEBANON FOR YEARS, AND, IN ANY CASE, SYRIAN ACTIONS DO NOT SEEM DESIGNED TO BRING THE MARONITES ON BOARD.

6. THUS, THE ISRAELIS DISAGREE WITH AMB. SEELYE'S ASSESSMENT. THEY DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THE SYRIANS HAVE SLOGGED IT OUT IN THE LEBANESE MORASS SO THAT THEY CAN EVENTUALLY

WITHDRAW THEIR TROOPS, SEE THEIR INFLUENCE REDUCED AND
FACE A GOL AND A REVITALIZED LEBANESE ARMY THAT CAN
SUCCESSFULLY RESIST THE DETERMINANTS OF SYRIAN NATIONAL
INTEREST, WHICH MUST BE TO HAVE A LEBANON SYMPATHETIC TO
DAMASCUS' VIEW OF THE WORLD.

7. COMMENT: IT SEEMS TO US THAT A CLEAR DEFINITION OF
ULTIMATE SYRIAN INTENTIONS IS BEYOND OUR GRASP. ALL OF
US CAN ONLY GUESS. WHAT IS CERTAIN IS THAT SYRIA CON-
TINUES TO MOVE AGAINST THE MILITIAS AND THAT, IF CARRIED
FAR ENOUGH, COULD TRIGGER DIRECT ISRAELI MILITARY INTER-
VENTION IN LEBANON. THE PROBLEM IS NOBODY KNOWS HOW FAR
THE STICK HERE WILL BEND BEFORE IT BREAKS. BUT ONE CAN
SAY THAT, IN THE PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES, ISRAELI INTER-
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S E C R E T SECTION 02 OF 02 TEL AVIV 11887

VENTION IN LEBANON WOULD AT BEST DAMAGE THE PEACE PROCESS
AND AT WORST IGNITE ANOTHER MIDDLE EAST WAR. SURELY
THE DISTANT OBJECTIVE OF A LEBANESE PHOENIX RISEN FROM
THE ASHES IS NOT WORTH THIS RISK. THAT, AMONG OTHER
REASONS, IS WHY IN OUR JUDGMENT THE U.S. CANNOT AFFORD
TO STAND BY WHILE SYRIA ATTEMPTS TO BRING THE MARONITE
MILITIAS TO THEIR KNEES. VIETS

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